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THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE.

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I. THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

IN dealing with the gospel of Luke we have an advantage, which we do not possess in the case of either Matthew or Mark, that the author opens his book with a preface which is rich in information concerning the literary and historical situation out of which the book arose :

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed.

From this statement we are enabled to glean several facts of great interest and significance : (*a*) When the evangelist wrote there were already in existence several narratives of the life of Jesus, more or less complete. (*b*) These narratives were based, at least in the intention of their writers, on the oral narratives of the life of Jesus which proceeded from the personal companions of Jesus, men who had witnessed the events from the beginning, and from the beginning had been ministers of the word, servants of the gospel.¹ It is suggested at least that there was a somewhat definite body of such oral narrative. (*c*) These previous gospels

¹ "They who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" are one class, not two; the phrase cannot mean, "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses," and "those who were ministers of the word." "From the beginning" must therefore mean from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, not of his life—an incidental reflection of the same conception of the limits of the gospel which appears in Mark and is expressed in Acts 1 : 21, 22, all the more interesting that it occurs in a book which includes a narrative of the birth and its associated events. The phrase "from the first" (literally "from above") in vs. 3 seems to go back of what the evangelist here calls the beginning, to the source of the stream of events, so to speak, in the facts that led up to the ministry of Jesus.

nevertheless left something to be desired; our author believes that he recognizes a need for a book in some respects different from those of his predecessors. (*d*) Our evangelist does not himself belong to the circle of eyewitnesses, but to those to whom the eyewitnesses transmitted their testimony (vs. 2). (*e*) Yet neither is he far removed from them; though others have preceded him in writing, yet he classes himself with those to whom the testimony of the eyewitnesses was delivered, and even associates himself under the pronoun "us" (vs. 1) with those among whom the events of Jesus' life occurred, thus intimating that these events fell within his own time. (*f*) He had access, therefore, not only to these other writings, but to that living oral testimony from which these other writers drew. (*g*) He had made painstaking investigation of the sources of his narrative, having searched things out from the beginning of that history. (*h*) He had in view in writing, not those to whom the history of Jesus was unknown, but those who had already been taught orally. Observe the significant testimony thus indirectly borne to the habit of the church, even at this early day, to teach the life of Christ, and the clear indication that this gospel at least was not for unbelievers, but for believers. (*i*) His object in writing is to furnish his reader an entirely trustworthy record of the life of Jesus, an historical basis of faith.

It is evident, not only that the statements of this preface have a direct bearing upon the question for whom and with what purpose the gospel was written, but that its distinct intimation that the author possessed, and perhaps used, older gospel writings must be taken into account in interpreting the indications of the gospel itself as to who the author was. We must be prepared to consider whether there are diverse indications of authorship, and to determine, as far as we may, whether any given feature of the narrative is traceable to the final author who wrote the preface, or to those earlier authors of whose writings he made use.

II. THE AUTHOR.

1. *His nationality as it appears in the gospel itself.*—There are numerous references in all parts of the gospel to Palestinian localities (1:5, 26, 39; 2:4, 39, 41; 3:1, 3; 4:16; 5:1, 17;

6:17; 7:11; 8:26; 10:13, 15; 17:11; 18:35; 19:1, 29, 37, 41; 23:5-7; 24:13). One or two of the localities referred to cannot be certainly identified,² but in every case in which the location of the place is known the reference of the gospel to it corresponds to its locality, and in some cases the correspondence of the narratives to the local conditions is somewhat striking.³ Observe also the reference to climate in 12:54 ff. To these may be added occasional references to the different elements of the population of the country and to their relations to one another (7:2; 17:16, 18).

A considerable number of the geographical references occur in passages which have closely parallel narratives in Matthew or Mark, suggesting the possibility that the author's geographical knowledge is second-hand. Yet in some of these cases Luke contains a definition of locality not found in the other gospels (4:31; 8:26), or an alternative name (5:1), and there are a number of correctly used geographical terms in passages of which there are no parallels in the other gospels (1:5, 26, 39; 2:4, 39, 41, etc.), including one which seems very clearly of an editorial character from the pen of the final author (3:1). Taken altogether, the evidence suggests at least such a general knowledge of the country as enabled the author intelligently to use and edit his sources.

The gospel frequently speaks, and always, so far as we are able to test it, correctly, of Jewish history, parties, institutions, and current opinions.

Thus the priests and the temple are spoken of in 1:5, 8-11, 21-23; 3:2; 5:14; 6:4; 10:31 (*cf.* 32); 17:14; 19:45-47; 20:1, 19; 21:1, 5; 22:4, 52, 54, 66; 23:13; the Pharisees, their usages, opinions, and characteristics, in 5:17, 21, 30, 33; 6:2, 7; 7:30, 36 ff.; 11:37-44; 12:1; 14:1, 3; 15:2; 16:14; 18:10, 11; 22:2; scribes or lawyers in 5:17; 10:25; 11:45-54;

²On Bethphage, 19:29, and Emmaus, 24:13, see the Bible Dictionaries. On "the country of the Gerasenes," 8:26, see note 2 in "Purpose and Plan of the Gospel of Matthew," *BIBLICAL WORLD*, January, 1898.

³On 4:31, "down to Capernaum," observe that Nazareth is 1,144 feet above sea-level, while Capernaum is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is 682 feet below sea-level. On the route of the triumphal entry as described by Luke in 19:37, 41 (these details are peculiar to him) see STANLEY, *Sinai and Palestine*, pp. 186-90.

14:3; 19:47; 20:1, 19, 46; 22:2, 66; the Sadducees in 20:27; the Sanhedrin in 9:22; 20:19; 22:2, 66; 23:13; 24:20; the publicans in 3:12; 5:27-30; 7:29; 18:10-13; 19:2, 8; the Jewish scriptures in 2:23; 3:4; 4:4, 8, 10, 12, 17-21; 7:27; 18:20, 31; 20:28, 37, 42; 24:27; characters and events of the Old Testament narrative in 4:25-27; 6:3, 4, 23; 9:8, 19, 30, 33; 10:12-14; 11:29-32, 51; 13:28; 16:29-31; 17:26-29, 32; recent events in 13:1-4; probably in 19:12; the custom of circumcision in 1:59-63; 2:21; the ceremonies in connection with the birth of a child in 2:22-27, 39; the Feast of the Passover in 2:41-46; 22:1, 7, 11, 13, 15; synagogues and their officers in 4:15, 16-30, 33, 38, 44; 7:5; 8:41, 49; 13:10, 14; 20:46; current opinions and expectations in 3:15; 9:8, 30; 13:28; 16:22; 18:38, 39; 20:17-33.

The facts respecting the use of Old Testament scripture in this gospel are somewhat peculiar. The first two chapters, the infancy section, are full of language manifestly derived from the Old Testament. This is especially true of the utterances of the angel, of Mary, of Zacharias, and of Simeon. But the narrative also contains Old Testament language, and even explicit quotations (2:23, 24). The genealogical table in chap. 3, though the fact that it is carried back, not as in Matthew to Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish nation, but to Adam, the progenitor of the human race, shows a wider horizon than that of the Jewish nation, is yet, of course, derived from Jewish sources, partly biblical, partly post-biblical. In the rest of the gospel, on the other hand, the use of scripture language is much less frequent. Like Mark, this gospel also records the use of scripture language by Jesus and others, the passages being in the majority of cases parallel to those in Mark or Matthew, but including also a number not reported in the other gospels. But outside the first two chapters and the genealogical table there is but one explicit quotation (Luke 3:4 ff.) by the evangelist, and this is parallel to the one passage in which the second gospel quotes the Old Testament. There is also one passage (23:34) in which Old Testament language is used in a narrative passage without reference to its Old Testament origin; this passage likewise being parallel to one in Mark and Matthew.⁴ The quotations as a

⁴ To this there should perhaps be added three passages in which WH recognize the use of Old Testament language (23:35, 36, 49), but the resemblance to the Old Testament is so slight and incidental, extending in two cases to a single word only, that they afford little evidence.

whole show the influence of the Septuagint, and no clear evidence that the author of the gospel knew Hebrew. (See PLUMMER, *Commentary on Luke*, p. xxxv.)

References to the political situation in Palestine are explicit and important. Incidental references occur in 1:5; 3:19, 20; 7:2; 8:3; 13:1; 19:12 (?); 20:22-24; 23:1-24 *passim*, 52. In all these cases, some of them paralleled in the other gospels, others peculiar to Luke, the references are true to the situation as we know it from other sources. There are also two passages peculiar to Luke which are evidently careful editorial notes: 2:1-3; 3:1, 2. The latter of these is an entirely correct statement of the political situation in Judea in the fifteenth year of Tiberius; but there is some difficulty in combining into a consistent chronology the statement that John the Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius and the data yielded respectively by Luke 2:1-3 and 3:23.⁵ The expression "in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas" (ἐπὶ ἀρχιερέως Ἄννα καὶ Καϊάφα — observe the use of the singular) reflects not very distinctly, yet not incorrectly, the peculiar situation of the time in respect to the office of high priest.⁶ The other passage, 2:1-5, creates more difficulty, and has given rise to prolonged discussion. Of the many solutions that have been proposed none is altogether satisfactory, in the sense of furnishing conclusive evidence that Luke's statement is wholly accurate, yet its erroneousness is far from proved, and it is at least possible that it is itself an important datum for the determination of the facts respecting enrolments in the Roman empire.⁷ In any case it remains that these two passages show an interest of the evangelist in the relations of the life of Jesus to the affairs of the Roman empire at large such as appears in none of the other gospels, and indicate a writer who had sought by investigation of the facts to connect the events he was narrating with the history of the land and the empire, rather than one who with easy familiarity with the

⁵ See Appended Note I.

⁶ See note 2 in "The Purpose and Plan of the Gospel of John," BIBLICAL WORLD, January, 1899; LIGHTFOOT, *Biblical Essays*, p. 163; PLUMMER, *ad loc.*

⁷ See Appended Note II.

facts mentioned them incidentally without effort or special intention.

References to social life, everyday occupations, and articles of common use are very frequent, so much so as to constitute a characteristic of this gospel as compared with the other gospels.

Thus the house is spoken of in 5:19; 11:7; 12:39; 13:25; 17:31; 22:11; various household utensils are mentioned in 1:63; 5:18; 8:16; 9:3; 10:4; 11:7, 33; 12:35; 15:8; 17:34; 22:36; the meals of the day in 7:36; 11:37; 14:1, 7, 8; 20:46; articles of food in 6:44; 9:13; 11:5, 11, 12; 13:21; 15:23; 17:35; 22:19; 24:30, 42; beverages in 1:15; 5:37; 7:33; 23:36; oil and ointment in 7:37, 38, 46; feasts and similar social customs in 7:44-46; 14:7-10; 15:22-25; funeral customs in 7:12, 14; 8:52; exigencies of travel in 9:3-5; 10:4-6, 10, 11, 34, 35; 11:5-7. Men of various occupations are mentioned: shepherds in 2:8; 15:4; 17:7; swineherds in 8:34; 15:15; plowmen in 17:7; fishermen in 5:5-7; corngrinders in 17:35; spinning in 12:27; *cf.* also 14:17; 15:17; servants and their duties in 12:35 ff., 42 ff.; 13:6-9. See MATHEWS, in BIBLICAL WORLD, June, 1895, pp. 450 ff., of which free use has been made in this list.

Most of these references have little or no evidential value in respect to the question of authorship, yet, taken together, they show a notable conformity to the conditions of life in Palestine.

The Greek of the gospel is of three somewhat distinct types. The preface is in excellent idiomatic Greek, with no suggestion of Hebraistic influence. The infancy section is very distinctly and strongly Hebraistic in character. The remainder of the gospel is less markedly Hebraic, resembling in general the gospels of Mark and Matthew, yet having some peculiarities of its own.⁸

All these facts, considered together, point to the conclusion that the author certainly employed Jewish sources, and was

⁸ Especially noteworthy are the use of the optative with *ἄν* (a classical idiom found in the New Testament only in Luke and Acts), the frequent employment of *ἐν* with the infinitive (a construction very common in the Septuagint, and found in all parts of Luke except the preface, and occurring six times as often as in Matthew and Mark together), the frequent occurrence of *ἐγέμερο δέ* and *καὶ ἐγέμερο* (about four times as often as in Matthew and Mark together), and prevailing with the Hebraistic construction following (indicative alone, or *καὶ* with an indicative; in Acts, on the other hand, usually with the infinitive following). Thus the peculiarities of Luke's style are in part Hebraistic, in part distinctly non-Hebraistic. See a detailed discussion of Luke's style in PLUMMER's *Introduction*, pp. li ff. and 45; HAWKINS, *Horæ Synoptica*, pp. 140-61.

familiar with Jewish affairs, but may not have been himself a Jew. The story of the infancy is of a strongly Jewish cast; the sources of the remainder of the book are quite similar in this respect to the gospel of Mark, and are presumably of Jewish origin, though not so pronouncedly Jewish in character as the infancy story or as the gospel of Matthew. The references to affairs of the Roman empire, and the extension of the genealogical table, are suggestive of a man who was either not a Jew, or who was at least somewhat decidedly cosmopolitan in his feeling. He shows too much sympathy with the Jewish point of view to have been a gentile who repudiated Judaism, and too broad an outlook to have been a Jew who held a narrow Jewish view of the world and God's relation to it. He might be a Jew of cosmopolitan feeling, or a gentile proselyte to Judaism.

2. *His religious position.*—Of this there is no room to doubt. Like the writers of all our gospels, the third evangelist is a Christian in his belief. The subject of his book is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and the things “which have been fulfilled among us,” and concerning which he desires his readers to “know the certainty,” are the deeds and teachings of Jesus. As respects the particular type of Christianity which he represented, it is evident that his sympathies would be with the Pauline rather than with the Judaistic party. Evidence of this will appear in connection with the consideration of the purpose of the book.

3. *Evidence concerning the identity of the author from outside the gospel.*—This is of three kinds:

a. That which is derived from the book of Acts, combined with the evident relation of the gospel and the Acts. That these two books are from the same author is so evident that it has been affirmed by critics of every school, and very rarely questioned.⁹ To determine the authorship of Acts would then be to determine that of the third gospel. The former problem, however, is scarcely less difficult than the latter. In certain

⁹ See, for example, PLUMMER, *Com. on Luke*, p. xi; HEADLAM, art. “Acts” in HASTINGS, *Dict. Bib.*, Vol. I, p. 29; SCHMIEDEL, art. “Acts” in *Encyc. Bib.*, Vol. I, p. 48; STANTON, in *Expositor*, May, 1893, pp. 336–50; FRIEDRICH, *Das Lukasevangelium und die Apostelgeschichte Werke desselben Verfassers*, Halle, 1890.

portions of Acts, known as the "we-sections" (16: 10-40; 20: 6-21: 17; 27: 1-28: 16 or 31), the narrative is told in the first person, implying that it is from the pen of an eyewitness of the events. That this implication is in accordance with the facts, and that the author of these sections was in fact a companion of the apostle Paul on some of his missionary journeys, is one of the assured results of historical criticism. It is natural to suppose that the author of these we-sections is at the same time the author of the whole book, the absence of the first-person pronoun in the other portions of it reflecting the fact that he is here, in part at least, relating what he had learned from others. There is, moreover, considerable evidence for this opinion in the prevalence throughout the book of certain peculiarities of style, as well as in the very fact of the retention of the "we" in these sections themselves. Yet there is by no means the same agreement on this point as on the autoptic character of the we-sections, and a certain conclusion concerning the authorship of the gospel can be drawn from the relation of it to Acts only when the Acts problem itself is definitely settled.¹⁰

b. The ancient manuscripts of the gospel uniformly bear the title *Κατα Λουκαν*, or its equivalent.

c. From the earliest times at which ancient writers mention any author of our gospel they ascribe it to Luke. The following are some of these testimonies:

"For in the memoirs which I say were composed by his apostles and those who followed them, it is written that his sweat fell down like drops of blood, while he was praying and saying, 'Let this cup, if it be possible, pass from me!'" (Luke 22: 44). (JUSTIN MARTYR, *Dial. with Trypho*, chap. 103.) The mention of the blood-like sweat being found in Luke only of our gospels, the statement of Justin is naturally understood as ascribing the gospel to an apostle or one of the companions of the apostles.

¹⁰ PLUMMER, *Com. on Luke*, p. xii, says, "It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that nothing in biblical criticism is more certain than this statement," viz., that the author of Acts (not simply of the "we-sections") was a companion of Paul. With this statement agree also LIGHTFOOT, art. "Acts" in SMITH, *Dict. Bib.*, 2d Eng. ed.; HEADLAM, art. "Acts" in HASTINGS, *Dict. Bib.*; RAMSAY, BLASS, and many others. On the other hand, MCGIFFERT, *Apostolic Age*, pp. 237 f., 433 f.; SCHMIEDEL, art. "Acts" in *Encyc. Bib.*, Vol. I; WENDT, *Kommentar über die Apostelgeschichte*, 8th ed., and JÜLICHER, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, p. 268, distinguish between the author of the "we-sections" and the author of the book.

IRENÆUS, naming the four gospels in the order in which they stand in modern versions, says: "Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel preached by him." (*Adv. Haer.*, iii, 1.)

"Thirdly, the gospel-book according to Luke. Luke the physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken him as it were as a follower zealous of the right, wrote it in his own name, as is believed. The Lord, nevertheless, he had not himself seen in the flesh, and accordingly, going back as far as he could obtain information, he began his narrative with the birth of John." (*The Muratorian Fragment*.)

These testimonies, dating from the middle and end of the second century—the Muratorian fragment is perhaps from the beginning of the third century—show what was believed in the church at the earliest period from which we have definite testimony. There is nothing in the gospel itself to contradict this belief, except as concerns the statement of Irenæus with reference to the relation of Paul to this gospel. That Paul exerted some influence upon the mind of the evangelist, and even upon the gospel itself, need not be questioned,¹¹ but that Luke drew his material to any considerable extent from Paul is excluded alike by Luke's own preface, in which he names as the source of his information "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word"—a phrase which would not include Paul—and the internal evidence of the relation of the gospels to one another.

The Luke to whom tradition ascribed the gospel is without question the one named in the New Testament as a companion of Paul, and referred to in Philem., vs. 24; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11. The second of these passages describes him as a physician, and the gospel itself yields some indication of having been written by one who was familiar with medical matters. (See HOBART, *Medical Language of Luke*; PLUMMER, *Com. on Luke*, pp. lxiii ff.) The same passage compared with vs. 11 implies that he was of gentile birth, and with this agree the internal indications of the gospel itself. (See above, p. 254.) If he was the author of the "we-passages" of the Acts, the journeys in which he

¹¹ Could the common text of Luke 22:19-21 be accepted as genuine, this would be an almost indubitable instance of dependence either of Luke upon Paul (1 Cor. 11:23-25) or of Paul upon Luke. But on this passage see WH, *New Testament in Greek*, Vol. II., App., pp. 63 f.

accompanied Paul gave him ample opportunity to meet and consult with those who were companions and ministers of Jesus. If there is any reason to doubt that he was in fact the author of our gospel, such reason is to be found, not in the gospel, but in the book of Acts. For our present purpose it is of more importance to observe that, whatever the name or personality of the evangelist, he was, according to the evidence of the gospel itself, substantially such a man as Luke ; not a personal follower of Jesus, but one who had access to the testimony of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life ; a man of Jewish sympathies, but of cosmopolitan interests ; a Christian whose affiliations were with the more liberal party in the early church.

III. THE READERS FOR WHOM THE BOOK WAS INTENDED.

Reference has already been made to the evidence in the preface to the gospel that it was written for Christian readers. Theophilus, to whom the book is addressed or dedicated, was probably a real person, but certainly also the representative of the class for whom especially the book was written. It is not probable either that the book was intended solely for his private reading, or that the other persons whom the author had in mind belonged to a distinctly different class from Theophilus. The only question, then, is whether the Christians for whom Luke wrote were predominantly Jews or gentiles. The name Theophilus, though suggesting gentile readers, would not be decisive, since so many Hebrews bore Greek names. But the content of the gospel leaves no room for doubt that the author has gentile readers especially in mind. There is a notable absence of Hebrew words, such as occur in Mark accompanied by an explanation, and in Matthew without explanation. There are a few geographical notes which suggest that the readers were not Palestinians (2:4 ; 8:26 ; 19:29). In a number of instances this gospel employs terms which would be intelligible to gentiles in place of Jewish terms used in parallel or similar passages in the other synoptic gospels.¹² The sermon of

¹² See, e. g., 5:19, "through the tiles," in place of expressions in Matthew and Mark which suggest a thatch roof ; *ἐπιστάτης*, 8:24 (Mark *διδάσκαλος*, Matthew *κύριος*) ; 5:5 ; 9:33, 49 ; 17:13 ; *βαββελ* never occurs in Luke ; *ἀληθῶς* (9:27 ; 12:44 ;

Jesus in 6: 20-49 conspicuously lacks that reference to the needs and point of view of the Jews which is so distinctly marked in the parallel discourse in Matt., chaps. 5, 6, 7. There are, as already noted (p. 251), but two references by the evangelist (as distinguished from Jesus and others whose words he records) to the fulfilment of Old Testament scripture, and both of these give evidence of being derived from the sources of the gospel. This author alone of the evangelists makes mention of the Roman emperor in whose reign the events recorded took place (3: 1), and more explicitly than the others defines the political status of Palestine at the time. The familiarity with Jewish affairs which he assumes on the part of his readers, especially in chaps. 1, 2 (but observe his explanation in 2: 23), at first sight suggests Jewish readers, but is in reality sufficiently explained by the fact that he wrote for Christians who had already heard the story of Jesus' life by word of mouth (1: 4). It must, moreover, be remembered, as the epistles of Paul already clearly show, that even gentile Christians early acquired a knowledge of the Old Testament.

[*To be completed in the next number.*]

21: 3) instead of *ἀμὴν*, which Luke uses, but much less frequently than Matthew; *νομικός* (7: 30; 10: 25; 11: 45, 46, 52; 14: 3) instead of *γραμματεὺς*, which Matthew and Mark usually employ. (See also MATHEWS, in *BIBLICAL WORLD*, May, 1895, pp. 340 f.; PLUMMER, *Com. on Luke*, p. xxxiv.)